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KWL and Homer's Illiad.

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Abstract

As a student teacher I was disappointed at initial confusion by my World Literature students when we began reading Homer's *Iliad*. I wanted to probe my students about the fascinating questions the story raises about the Greek culture, the qualities of a hero, and fate and free will. However, it was impossible to discuss themes when my students constantly needed to be reminded who the characters were or what was happening in the story. In this study, I assigned KWL (Know, Want to know, Learned) charts to students to complete while reading Book 22 of the *Iliad*. Students who completed KWL charts demonstrated better recall of character names and plot points in the story as evident in their scores on a summative assessment of the story. Students who completed KWL charts also asked more complex questions and engaged in higher-level discussion about the story than did students who did not complete KWL charts. The study suggests that using reading strategies such as KWL charts are effective in overcoming comprehension obstacles for average to low-ability students when reading complex literature.

Background/Context

- This study occurred in a suburban school in Northwest Indiana in a class of average to low-ability 12th grade students. This school is highly diverse in population.
- I had guided the students through the story, drawing stick figures on the board to illustrate important events and instructing them to take notes on the plot.
- Based on poor scores on the quiz over Book 1, I concluded that writing down plot points was not an effective way for these students to understand the story.
- The students could not see the connections from one point to the next, and constantly explaining the motivations of the characters was not making the connections any clearer.

Know, Want to know, Learned (KWL) Chart

K	W	L
Know: This is where students recorded information they recalled from Book 1 about plot and character.	Want to know: This is where students recorded questions they had about the text.	Learned: This is where students recorded information that they learned in Book 22.

Methods

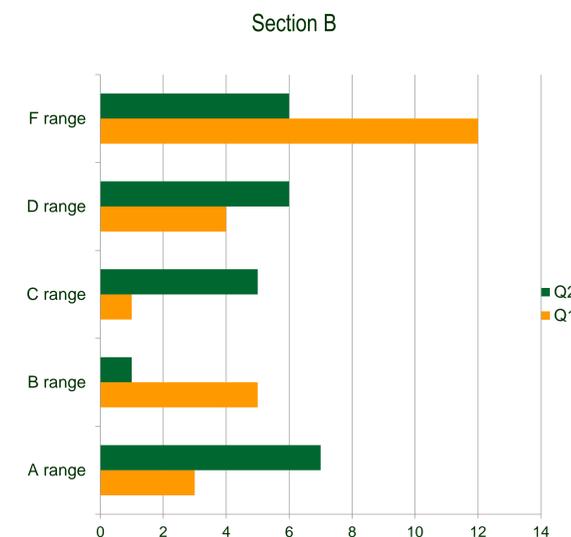
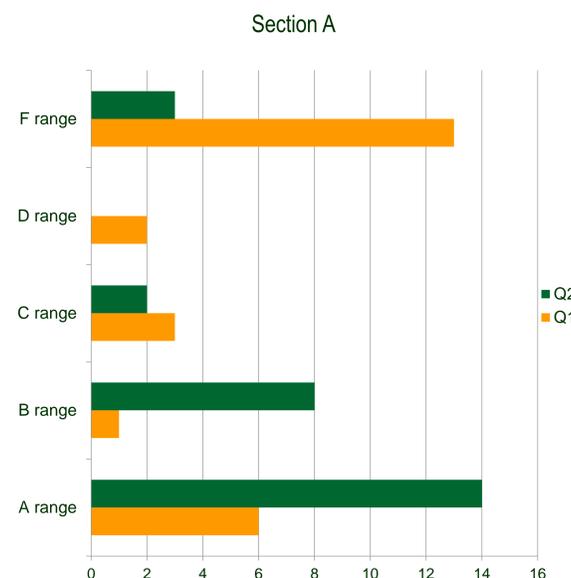
- Section A, the experimental group, contained 27 students. I assigned this group KWL charts along with the traditional lecture and note-taking as we read Book 22 of the *Iliad*.
- Section B, the control group, contained 26 students. This group was not assigned KWL, but received the same lecture and did the same note-taking while reading Book 22.
- Lecture consisted of a visual PowerPoint with pictures of the characters and scenes from the story. Note-taking consisted of the drawing of stick-figures on the whiteboard to illustrate parts of the story.
- In addition, both Section A and Section B watched YouTube videos of students acting out scenes from the *Iliad*.
- Qualitative data consisted of observations from class discussion about the book. Specifically, I looked for improvements in students' abilities to use character names correctly in reference to specific events in the plot, and I hoped to see students asking questions that relate to theme and character motivation as opposed to questions about plot and character identity.
- Quantitative data consisted of a comparison of scores on the *Iliad* Book 1 quiz and the *Iliad* Book 22 quiz.
- I hypothesized that Section A's scores would improve significantly more than Section B's.

Discussion of Observations

- During discussion, Section A improved in their ability to refer to specific points in the plot and identifying characters.
- Section A asked questions to clarify plot and character identity less frequently than did Section B.
- Overall, the relationships of the characters to each other and the relationships of plot points to each other seemed more salient to Section A during class discussions.
- Section B asked questions such as "Who is Apollo?", "Which is the Trojan? Achilles or Hector?", "What is Athena doing?", and "What's going on here?"
- Section A asked more complex questions such as "Why does Athena hate the Trojans?", "Why does Achilles do that [desecrate Hector's body]?", "Does Achilles die? Can he die?", and "Why doesn't Paris fight?"
- In Section B, while lecturing about a part of the story, I was frequently interrupted with "Why?" and "Who?" Upon answering the Section B student, follow-up questions were typically "Who is that again?" or "What happened?"
- Section A typically followed up explanations with "Why?" or by adding their own personal insight to the explanation.

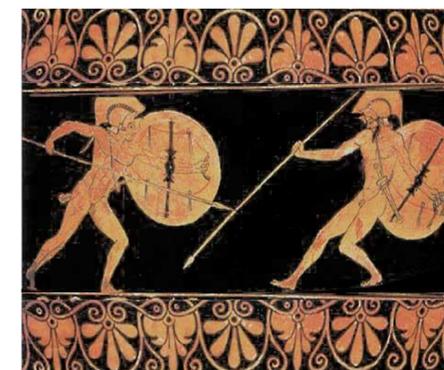
Results

Section A's average for the Book 1 quiz (Q1) was 6/10 (D-). Section B's average for Q1 was 5/10 (F). Section A's average for Book 22 quiz (Q2) was 9/10 (A-). Section B's average for Q2 was 6/10 (D-). While both classes improved, Section A improved by an average of 4 letter grades (40%). Section B improved by only an average of one letter grade (10%).



Conclusions/Implications

- KWL charts did seem to aid in students' ability to recall events and characters in Homer's *Iliad*.
- KWL charts would be beneficial for average to low-ability students' comprehension of complex literature.
- Students who used KWL charts were more able to overcome the obstacles of remembering many characters with foreign names and remembering a long and complex plot to discuss deeper themes in the story.
- Students who did not use KWL charts had more difficulty overcoming these obstacles and tended to ask questions about surface details of the story such as character identity and plot, not deeper themes or character motivation.
- Average to low-ability students are capable of comprehending complex literature with proper scaffolding.
- As a student teacher, I learned that poor grades on quizzes were not necessarily an indicator that I was bad at explaining the story.
- Teachers should not be discouraged from teaching complex literature to average and low-ability students.
- To be fully conclusive, the study should be repeated with different students, different stories, and different quizzes.
- This study did not take into account student studying outside of class or the difficulty of the quizzes.
- While familiarity, inherent difficulty of the quiz, and student independent study outside of class could have affected the results, it appears that KWL charts played a significant role in helping Section A achieve on Q2.



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